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## FROM THE EDITOR

# It's Time to Get Serious About ICD-10

**Our article series will help prepare you, and so will a sense of humor.**

Family physician Bob Newbell, MD, once described in *FPM* the absurdity of a diagnosis code set that offered no code for common rhinorrhea yet included one for injuries sustained by “any hapless soul who gets run over by a spaceship.”<sup>1</sup> Yes, that would be ICD-9 code E845.9, “Accident involving spacecraft injuring other person.” By now you’ve heard that ICD-10 will be replacing ICD-9, and you’ll be relieved to know that the new code set offers 30 codes related to spacecraft injuries, including the ability to distinguish between initial and subsequent encounters, as well as codes for “Burn due to water skis on fire,” and “Bitten by turtle,” “Struck by turtle,” and “Other contact with turtle.” Thank goodness.

Of course there’s a lot more than this to know about ICD-10, but warming up your sense of humor seems like a good first step toward familiarizing yourself with the new code set and coming to terms with the changes it will require in your practice. Cindy Hughes’ cover story on ICD-10 will help you take the next step, which should be to begin preparing for the transition from ICD-9. She outlines the basic differences between the two code sets, identifies key ways in which the transition will affect documentation and billing systems, and puts some of the hype surrounding ICD-10 into perspective. For example, she points out that ICD-10 is not as large as it sounds (at nearly 70,000 codes, it is roughly five times larger than ICD-9) because the inclusion of digits to specify right, left, bilateral, and unspecified laterality adds depth but not breadth to the code set. And then there are the improbable injury codes that you’ll never consult, unless you need some comic relief.

A mid-February announcement from the Department of Health and Human Services suggests that it will delay the October 2013 deadline for transition to ICD-10 to allow providers more time to prepare. Whatever the length of the delay, we plan to use all of it to help you make this transition. The article in this issue begins an extensive series introducing ICD-10. Start getting ready now, and watch upcoming issues for more information and advice.



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1. Newbell BJ. Coding nonsense, NOS. *Fam Pract Manag*. October 2005;82. <http://www.aafp.org/fpm/2005/1000/p82.html>.